



U.S. Department
of Transportation

**Federal Highway
Administration**

Memorandum

Subject: **ACTION:** Highway Traffic Noise Guidance
and Policies and Written Noise Policies

Date June 12, 1995

From: Executive Director

Reply to
Attn of HEP-41

To: Regional Administrators
Federal Lands Highway Program Administrator

Attached for your information and use is a copy of "Highway Traffic Noise Policy and Guidance." This is a reissuance of existing guidance on highway traffic noise analysis, completed in response to an audit of the highway traffic noise program by the OIG and by a desire to reduce and consolidate over 130 pages of existing material. In addition, we are reemphasizing the highway traffic noise program and our commitment to environmental excellence. A responsive traffic noise program is important to ensure that residents located adjacent to highways receive appropriate noise abatement.

It is important that States conduct adequate and fully documented traffic noise analyses. The attached document is meant to bring together a wide range of independent guidance material into a single consolidated source. It supersedes the following existing FHWA materials: (1) "Traffic Noise Analysis for Highway Projects Which Add Through-Traffic Lanes" (May 1987); (2) "Type II Projects for Highway Traffic Noise Abatement" (June 1988); (3) "Highway Traffic Noise Analysis and Abatement" (1989); (4) "Highway Traffic Noise: State Highway Agency Policies and Procedures" (April 1989); (5) Discussion Paper: "Appropriate Level of Highway Traffic Noise Analysis for CE, EA/FONSI, and EIS" (June 1989); (6) "Field Review Report: Highway Traffic Noise Impact Identification and Mitigation Decisionmaking" (June 1989); (7) "Highway Traffic Noise Analysis: Reasonableness and Feasibility of Abatement" (May 1992); and (8) "Guidance for Highway Traffic Noise Analysis" (December 1993).

You should note the changes/additions/reiterations to FHWA traffic noise policies which have occurred as a result of OIG recommendations, as shown on the attachment. It is important to point out that there is a change in existing FHWA policy which puts new restrictions on the approval of Type II abatement. In addition, other new policy changes include the following:

1. An acceptable cost/residence index for determining the reasonableness of abatement should be within the range of \$15,000-50,000/residence. The cost of reasonable abatement may fall outside the acceptable range if there is sufficient additional justification, particularly if severe traffic noise impacts occur.

2. The method used to count residences should include all dwelling units, e.g., owner-occupied, rental units, mobile homes, etc., that are "benefitted," regardless of whether or not they were identified as impacted. A State should define the threshold of noise reduction which determines a "benefitted" residence. This threshold should be within the range of 3-5 dBA.
3. The "date of public knowledge" cannot precede the date of approval of CEs, FONSI, or RODs. Previously, FHWA left the determination of this date entirely to a State.

Within 1 year from the date of this memorandum, all SHAs must adopt written statewide noise policies that have been approved by FHWA. Regional Administrators are delegated the authority to approve the State policies. This authority may be redelegated to Division Administrators. The policies must demonstrate substantial compliance with the noise regulations, 23 CFR Part 772, as well as with the reissued noise policies and guidance.

Those regions desiring a Washington office review, should send copies of the draft policies to Bob Armstrong in HEP-41 for review and comment before taking an approval action. One copy of each approved policy should also be sent to HEP-41.

Thank you for assistance in this matter. Questions or comments may be directed to Bob Armstrong or Steve Ronning at (202) 366-2073 or (202) 366-2078, respectively.



Anthony R. Kane

2 Attachments

ATTACHMENT

Changes/Additions/Reiterations to FHWA Traffic Noise Policies

1. Page 11, paragraph 1: "It is also important to remember that noise abatement consideration should be an inherent project consideration that is not handled separately, but is incorporated and considered in the total project development decision."
2. Page 16, paragraph 4: "... after the date of issuance of this guidance, Type II abatement projects for new activities and land uses which come into existence may only be approved if an active local land use control program was adopted prior to existence of the new activities and land uses. EXAMPLE: A Type II noise barrier is requested for homes that were constructed prior to a local community's adoption of an active noise-compatible land use control program. Type II abatement may not be approved for this location. SHAs should be certain to make local officials aware of this requirement."
3. Page 18, paragraph 3: "The prevention of future impacts is one of the most important parts of noise control. The compatibility of the highway and its neighbors is essential for the continuing growth of local areas. Both development and highways can be compatible, but local government officials need to know what noise levels to expect from a highway and what techniques they can use to prevent future impacts. States can help by providing this information to local governments; such information should be made available for disclosure in real estate transactions."
4. Page 23, paragraph 2: "The project development records should fully document the traffic noise analysis level-of-effort expended, strategies considered, adjacent residents' views and opinions, and a final decision on the reasonableness and feasibility of abatement."
5. Page 27, paragraph 1: "Traffic noise analyses should recognize and consider absolute noise levels as well as incremental increases in noise levels when identifying traffic noise impacts and when considering noise abatement measures."
6. Pages 55 and 56, paragraphs 8 and 1: "SHAs typically determine reasonable cost by using a cost index, usually with residences representing people impacted. Most SHAs use a cost/residence index, while some use a cost/residence/dBA reduction. An acceptable cost/residence index should be within the range of \$15,000-50,000/residence. Other acceptable indices, such as cost/residence/dBA reduction, should be shown to be within this range for cost/residence. The cost of reasonable abatement may fall outside the acceptable range if there is sufficient, additional justification, particularly if severe traffic noise impacts occur."

The method used to count residences is important and should be clearly delineated. The number of residences should include all dwelling units, e.g., owner-occupied, rental units, mobile homes, etc. When counting residences to determine reasonableness, all "benefitted" residences should be included, regardless of whether or not they were identified as impacted (each unit in a multi-family building should be counted as one residence in determining both impacts and benefits). A State should define the threshold of noise reduction which determines a "benefitted" residence. This threshold should be within the range of 3-5 dBA.

7. Page 76, paragraph 2: "The FHWA has previously left entirely to a State the determination of the "date of public knowledge." However, from now on, the "date of public knowledge" cannot precede the date of approval of CEs, FONSIIs, or RODs.